CHOICES

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THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT MAGAZINE

Inside:

The Population and Development Agenda: Five Viewpoints

A Separate Peace on Nicaragua's "Miskito Coast"

Early Warnings From Small Islands

The Military and Human Rights in Ecuador

Georgia: Balancing Acts

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SEPTEMBER 1994

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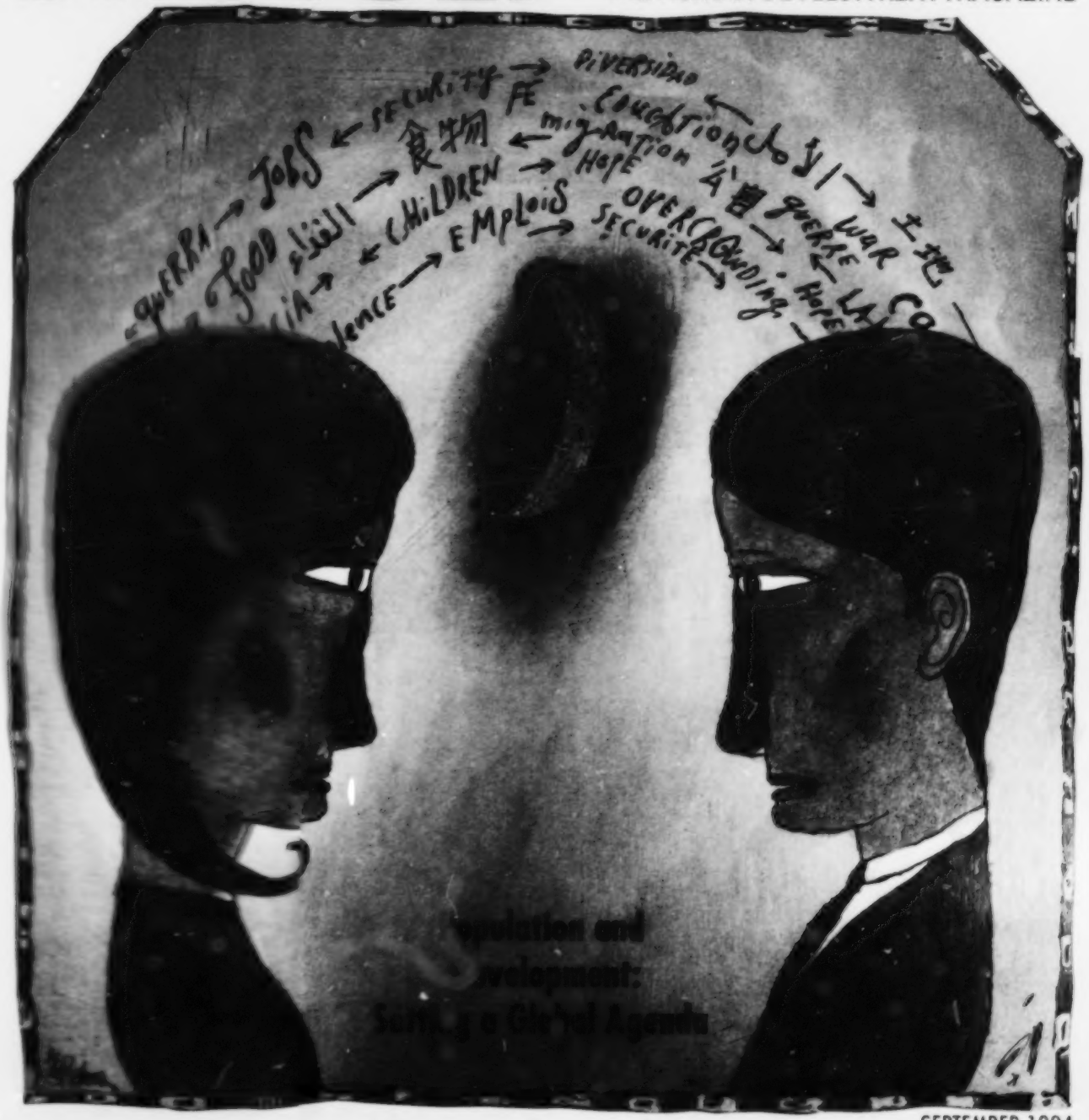

SEPTEMBER 1994

Once again, the **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT** *challenges the status quo.*

THE 1994 REPORT SHOWS:

- **How ethnic and regional development gaps — like that of Chiapas, Mexico, featured in last year's report — are likely to spur conflict in other countries.**
- **How warning signals such as rampant unemployment, human rights violations and high levels of military spending can forecast Somalia-like "national breakdowns" elsewhere in the world, and why "human security" should replace "national security."**
- **How the poorest countries squander scarce resources on arms, and how the five permanent members of the UN Security Council may be fueling global instability by providing 86 per cent of the conventional weapons exported to the developing world.**
- **How development assistance has worked for and against the poorest people of the world, and why foreign aid by itself is no answer.**
- **How the 1995 Social Summit can be a turning point toward sustainable human development.**

The cover of the 1994 report shows the decline in global military spending from 1987 to 1994, which yielded a "peace dividend" of US$935 billion. Unfortunately, little of this has been directed to urgent human needs. If arms spending goes on declining by three per cent a year, another $460 billion could be saved from 1995 to 2000. How will it be spent? This will be one of the challenges for the World Summit for Social Development in 1995.

Human Development Report 1994
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See back cover for ordering information.

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Along Nicaragua's isolated and almost impenetrable "Miskito Coast," a small UNDP-supported programme is helping indigenous communities to rebuild after a decade of civil war.

A Separate Peace

Bluefields, Nicaragua — The earth unrolls hot and brown under the 16-passenger Cessna that flies from Managua toward Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast. Long ago deforested, this western half of the country is thirsty in the dry season, its low mountains bare. After an hour in the air, however, the land below springs to life: forests, rich swamplands, snaking rivers, green jungle meeting a grey-blue sea, and just offshore, a coral reef.

If the contrast between Nicaragua's Pacific and Atlantic sides is stark from the air, it is even more dramatic on the ground. From the moment we landed on the beach runway at Bluefields, I could sense it: the feeling is Caribbean. I hear English and Creole spoken, besides Spanish. Alongside *mestizos*, or Latins with Hispanic ways, this Atlantic Coast is also home to blacks, to white descendants of English colonizers, and to Miskito, Sumo and Rama Indians with their own indigenous tongues. Music is reggae and rap, of course, not ranchero. And the coastal plain feels moist even in the dry season, with just enough drizzle a day, as locals say, "to keep de birds' eggs cool."

Despite their differences, *costeños*, as Atlantic Coast residents are known, share something important with other Nicaraguans: the fresh memory of a decade of war that cost 45,000 lives. That war was fought not just in the towns of the west, but also among these rivers and seaside villages. Nevertheless, costeños say their history and problems remain so distinct from those of the other side of the country, that they sometimes feel they live in a separate world. There is a metaphor for the distance this coast feels from the capital in Managua: no road links them. To residents in Bluefields, the single settlement on the southern half of the coast that might be called a city (pop: 50,000), the government of President Violeta Chamorro can feel far away.

Travelling from Bluefields by boat north toward villages hardest hit by combat and lost sons, I think of what Robert Grosse had told me a few days before in his Managua headquarters.

Photos by Sue Cunningham / JB Pictures

A Sumo Indian mother and child at church in Karawala.

By Mary Jo McConahay

Photos by Lou Dematteis

Grosse is an officer with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and is responsible for a development effort in the Autonomous Region of the southern half of the Atlantic Coast, known by its Spanish initials as PRORAAS. Begun in 1993, PRORAAS is funded by the Government of the Netherlands and executed by UNDP. Its aim is to assist some 10,000 persons who live on the remote, steaming rivers of this coastal region, and to further the process of national reconciliation.

"This project was put together quickly to react to the needs of refugees, the displaced, people trying to get their lives together after the war," Grosse had said. First priorities for the two-year, US$1.26 million project have been health and education.

Now as the region emerges from the immediate post-war crisis, and struggles to get on its feet economically, Grosse said, PRORAAS must shift its focus to helping villagers increase agricultural and fishing production, a priority of the central government. A second $3.9 million phase of PRORAAS is set to last two more years.

But as Grosse outlined to me back in Managua, the challenges are many. Costeños want to work, but formal job opportunities are extremely few. A vacuum of authority on the sea means modern-day pirates take local fish and lobster out to their own countries as if

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it were gold. And there is the unpredicted: the PRORAAS effort is rooted in communities where some of the most respected leaders – with whom any development programme might be expected to work – have been discovered to traffic in cocaine to put food on the table. To make matters "even more interesting," as one programme staff member put it, the problems must be met within an effervescent political scene: costeños are demanding more control over their natural resources – real political and economic autonomy from the government in Managua.

The first lesson of Nicaragua's southern Atlantic Coast is the difficulty of communication. Outside Bluefields there are no telephones, no working airstrips and not a single road linking one town with another. To reach the five seaside villages where PRORAAS has its programme, 150 kilometres north of Bluefields at the mouth of the river called Río Grande de Matagalpa, is a journey of two to three days by an irregularly scheduled, precariously overcrowded boat. To shorten the trip to several rough hours, we have rented an open metal skiff with a big engine and fine skipper. (Not an option for locals: daily rent equals two months' salary for a school-teacher.) En route we must soap puncture holes in a 200-litre drum to prevent the gasoline reserve from escaping after hard bumps, and wet the prow to keep paint flakes from flying into our eyes. But there is little choice of boats. When you ask PRORAAS staff in Bluefields what the problem of the day is, inevitably they answer: "Transportation, transportation."

Yet the trip is instructive. Heading out at dawn, we pass evidence of the lasting devastation of Hurricane Joan, which tore into the coast in 1988, leaving 27 dead and more than $400 million in damage. Even today what looks like a forest of chopsticks rises for thousands of hectares out of the re-emerging jungle, a reminder of the tall, valuable trees that once grew here. Skeletons of fish-processing plants that once provided jobs stand eerily on shore, unrehabilitated first because of the war, and now because neither the central government nor private parties want to reinvest in them. Hulks of steel-hulled fishing boats, a memory of livelihoods, tilt rusting in the mud-banks. This is the picture six years after a natural disaster in a place where there is no such thing as a disaster relief agency, or funded rapid clean-up. It is like a photograph of one reason costeños say they feel "abandoned."

Bob Gale

After hours of riding lagoons and salty rivers that run just inland, parallel to the sea, we reach the town of Karawala, PRORAAS rural headquarters. Its wooden houses stand on stilts, each porch with its hammock. This is home to Sumo Indians, farmers and fishermen. Like the other four villages in this area where the big Matagalpa River empties into the sea, an area called in Spanish the *desembocadura*, Karawala displays at first glance immediate results of PRORAAS: a proper school, built of concrete, with desks made by hand by residents with material from PRORAAS, and a concrete health centre with examining rooms for privacy. Because Karawala is the biggest of the villages, and has a government doctor, PRORAAS built a four-bed facility with community labour here to receive patients with cholera, the highly infectious, often deadly disease that is scourging Latin America again for the first time in a century.

After the school and clinics, what do Karawala residents want to show the visitor? A basketball court that they planned and poured with programme materials, and that appears to be in constant use. It does not seem a frivolous effort in a region where almost 100 per cent of the surface area of every village is mush during the six-month rainy season, and most of the population is under age 15. Team uniforms for baseball, about which Nicaraguans in general are fanatic, are another morale-builder in each village, presented in exchange for labour on programme projects. "Baseball is the only thing that wasn't

Typical homes in the desembocadura.

paralyzed by the war," one woman told me.

It is not possible to understand the world in which the residents of Karawala live today without understanding the recent history of Indian combatants in the war that raged here in the 1980s against the Sandinista government. One former fighter, Milando Simone, spoke to me late one afternoon on the steps of his raised porch, a two-year-old boy playing at his feet. Simone said he has a hard time producing enough food for his growing family to eat, let alone make cash for other needs.

"I fought for eight years thinking every day that when this is over, I just want to walk around free and not worry over surviving every minute," Simone told me. "That is not what happened."

Milando Simone's story was one I heard in different versions from men his age throughout the desembocadura. He was a combatant for Yatama, an Indian political movement whose predecessor groups developed in the 1970s, and which received a great boost from promises of autonomy from the revolutionary Sandinista government after 1979. The Indians did not want a state independent of Nicaragua, just as they do not want political independence now. But they did want more control over the rich natural resources of the coast, from which they said they received no benefit, despite the exploitation of hardwoods, gold and fishing by foreign companies licensed by Managua. They wanted certain other rights, including recognition of their own languages. ("Without it a dying Miskito's will was invalid if he couldn't write it in Spanish," a professor in Bluefields told me.) And they wanted more control over their daily affairs, instead of feeling, as some still put it, like an "internal colony" of Managua. With his brother, Leban, and dozens of other youths in these villages, Simone became a fighter when Yatama decided to take up arms, considering that the Sandinistas had broken their promises. By 1983, even apolitical youngsters were leaving the towns and joining rebels, to avoid obligatory military service instituted that year by the Sandinistas. ("They wouldn't fight against their brothers, so they went into the bush," a man said in the town of Sandy Bay.)

> The Indians did not want a state independent of Nicaragua. But they did want more control over the rich natural resources of the coast.

The Indians' rebellion took place during the Sandinista war against counter-revolutionaries whose forces were trained, armed and funded by the Government of the United States. Pressured by war on all sides, the Sandinistas signed a kind of separate peace with the Indian fighters of this Atlantic Coast, and implemented a sweeping Autonomy Law in 1987: experts consider it one of the most advanced in the world in the field of autonomous territory and indigenous legislation. Yet it stands, an exquisite but impotent declaration of principles, because the government which defeated the Sandinistas in democratic elections in 1990 has not implemented the law with regulations to increase local control over economic life. The currently fractured hopes for the Autonomy Law are making a dangerous mix with other elements, including the shutdown of state enterprises and the lack of outreach by the economically-strapped central government, to create the worst job outlook in memory. In the villages of the desembocadura I noticed money circulates hardly at all — on the dock at Karawala I watched bananas being traded for fish in a typical transaction. (But no one takes bananas for medicine, for instance.)

"Out there in the bush I had many skills I could use to keep myself alive," laments Simone. "But I brought back nothing that can serve me as a civilian. We were so happy with the idea of autonomy, with the idea of freedom to control our lives, but nothing real has come out of it. What jobs can we get? What can we do now?"

For the thousands of costeños who voted in this year's second Autonomous Region elections, the answers will come with more economic independence from Managua. In February, voters elected 45 representatives in this

A school built by the people of Walpa.

southern region, and another 45 in the north, to a Regional Council. The new Council's responsibility includes pushing legislation that defines the Coast's regional status within the national state. The winning candidates represented a mix of parties, including Yatama, the FSLN or Sandinista party, a few from Chamorro's coalition, new parties, and many from political groups prominent in the western half of the country. Beyond the question of parties, however, analysts say the impressive 85 per cent voter turnout itself is telling – a vote of confidence in the democratic electoral system as a way of resolving problems that once sent the Coast to war. Two of the Regional Council's newly-elected representatives, Dexter Levy (FSLN) and Leonzo Knight Julian (Yatama) of Karawala, spoke long into one night about the need to put party politics aside in order to further communal goals.

"We must fight to get the benefit of the autonomy that is already there in the law," said Levy, who also serves with Knight and other leading Karawala residents on the PRORAAS Local Committee.

"We grew up together," said Knight, a teacher, nodding toward Levy. "Now people are looking for us to do something for them, together."

To support the emergent democratic process, PRORAAS responded to a request to co-finance an educational seminar for the newly elected representatives, including Levy and Knight, with the Bluefields Caribbean Indian University. While they may be the popular choice of their communities, some of the new members still had to learn exactly what their role in the Council is, as well as the details of the Autonomy Law itself.

The democratic process is slow compared to the speed with which some costeños are demanding solutions. In Sandy Bay, another desembocadura village, some residents including religious and civic leaders have a desperate answer to their economic dilemma: drug traffic. According to police and other sources, cocaine trafficking, use of cocaine and crack and money laundering have appeared, especially in the last two years. If it sounds incongruous that this should happen in a region barely able to feed itself, consider the geography: Sandy Bay is about as close to the Colombian island of San Andres by high-speed launch as it is to Bluefields. Boats coming out of Colombia, with its drug trade, may buy catches from local fishermen with drug dollars or exchange for the stuff itself, in a kind of lobster connection that effectively launders money.

And there is perhaps the most idiosyncratic hustle of all: boats pursued by authorities on nearby high seas regularly jettison drug shipments, which locals find washed up on beaches and then offer to an increasingly well-established network that includes Managua and the United States. The current that caresses these shores has long carried strange cargos: an old book tells of one village lit happily for a week when barrels of paraffin appeared; in another town's graveyard I saw mounds where nine teenagers were buried in 1986 after drinking sea-tossed poison, thinking they had discovered a barrel of liquor. Seen from these villages, it is possible to believe found cocaine, or even drugs provided to locals to push, might be considered more godsend than sin.

Myrna Cunningham, a Miskito medical doctor who is a representative from the Atlantic Coast to the national Legislative Assembly, is furious with traffickers she accuses of taking advantage of high unemployment to "decompose" the communities, a problem she considers even more serious than incipient consumption. To the visitor, drug activity looks like a force with the potential to unravel the very structures of respected local authority – Indian authority – that PRORAAS aims to strengthen.

"The traffickers are trying to destroy the spiritual values that have maintained these communities despite everything they have been through," Cunningham told me in an interview in Managua. "They turn practically the whole community to conspiring. They give out a little, then a little more to each one to sell. Young men who work at diving for lobster – some of the few with jobs at all – give up the jobs to traffic. How do you confront all this? It's difficult to know, because it's so new. And people simply don't see drug trafficking as a crime: if someone comes to them with something to sell so they can survive, they see instead that they're being done a favour."

For PRORAAS too, the cocaine twist seems a tragic surprise. "Lamentably, some kind of drug education was not foreseen in this project," said Robert Grosse drily in Managua. (The United Nations International Drug Control Programme intends to sponsor a drug-

Many survive at subsistence levels through fishing and agriculture. Above: Fishermen craft canoes in Karawala.

prevention component in the PRORAAS programme's second phase, set to begin in September.)

Meanwhile, in the villages, the illegal activity makes life for PRORAAS even more complex. A key project – giving outboard engines on credit to hard-working residents so they can fish farther out to sea for more valuable lobster – was on hold at mid-year, the dozen precious motors still boxed and stored, guarded by police in Karawala. Virtually every one of the intended recipients in Sandy Bay, including five members of the Local Committee that represents PRORAAS in the community, were arrested on trafficking charges in December in a police dragnet. ("Caught red-handed," the lieutenant in charge proudly told me.) PRORAAS staff say it is "neither ethical nor practical" to deliver the engines until courts have passed judgement on the case. But residents complain that withholding them punishes the entire community for something they do not regard as a terrible offense. Each engine might aid several families, as two to four fishermen customarily spend up to a week at a time together at sea (gasoline is too expensive to come in every night), and share their catch.

"People don't want to do it, but it's a kind of necessity," a schoolteacher, who is not among the arrested, told me about the "temptation" of trafficking. "If you have four or five children you have to feed them somehow."

The situation illustrates a dilemma: in an effort whose heart is strengthening a community itself, through local participation in shaping every aspect of the programme, how do you contradict a community's feelings about its own solutions? Clearly the answer must include respect for just law. But that does not make resolving the dilemma much easier.

> The democratic process is slow compared to the speed with which some costeños are demanding solutions.

Dramatic as it is, drug trafficking is only the most recent example of the boom and bust cycle that characterizes economic life on this coast. Living on subsistence agriculture and fishing, without the security of permanent jobs, the population has lent itself to whatever occupation chance brings, inevitably in the form of enterprises run by outsiders: banana plantations, timber extraction, a fishing lodge, mining. Also inevitably, the enterprises pull out without much warning, even brusquely; villagers end up once again without income, and often disoriented or dislocated.

In Bluefields, PRORAAS Technical Committee Coordinator Susana Farfán had reflected on the importance of breaking this cycle of dependency on waves of temporary boom and lengthy bust: what is called for, she said, is assistance to create viable, long-lasting survival strategies, a self-sustaining food supply and even cash income for the villages. For Farfán, PRORAAS aims more than anything else to help establish a community structure that will enable villagers to depend deeply on themselves, long after first aid is gone.

Key to this self-help vision is a communal revolving fund in each town, financed initially by PRORAAS but administered by the local Council of Elders – authorities recognized and respected by the indigenous communities in which they live. (Administration by the Elders also supports their authority, which was pre-empted at times by military and state authorities during the war.) Beneficiaries are selected by each town's PRORAAS Local Committee, made up of leaders such as pastors of the majority Moravian and Anglican churches, teachers, the Council of Elders and others. The idea is to support production, by providing seeds on credit, for instance; in some cases, the debt can be repaid to the fund in kind – ten kilos of beans for five of seed, let's say. It is "interest" so low, said Farfán, "it doesn't cover our costs. But if we achieve even this much, it's very important: we will have established the idea of credit and repayment, which has not been done here."

Banks barely exist in the Atlantic

Costeños say they receive little benefit from the exploitation of their rich natural resources, including timber.

half of the country, and certainly do not make loans to villagers such as those of the desembocadura. Church and some international donors may make hand-outs, then leave, reinforcing what Farfán calls "that mentality of dependence." But for Farfán, as the idea of the revolving fund takes root, success will be measured not simply in debts repaid, but in a strengthening of "the idea of responsibility to the community." Social pressure is meant to encourage repayment, for example, because only the funds generated will be recycled into more loans.

Nevertheless, replenishing the funds has been slow. Eighty per cent of the 1993 rice harvest was lost to unusually fierce storms. Farmers complained the 1994 price for beans was so low they would lose badly if they repaid immediately. In another reflection of the complexity of introducing even an easy-going credit system in a subsistence community, Farfán estimates families ate 30 to 40 per cent of rice seed advanced to them instead of planting it, "because conditions are so difficult."

Within the bigger picture of problems rooted in war, historic marginalization and stormy acts of God, there are smaller moments of satisfaction that anyone travelling the desembocadura can find. Off one port village called La Barra, partners Nelson Teylar and John Homfris work aboard their 14-metre-long boat, *Sun of Norway*, which they salvaged damaged and abandoned from the sea last year. With help from PRORAAS, which provided a 55-hp engine on credit, the entire community benefits from the provident find.

> Banks barely exist in the Atlantic half of the country, and certainly do not make loans to villagers such as those of the desembocadura.

The *Sun* buys snook, grouper and shark daily from fishermen who row up in their dugout canoes. Twice a week, Teylar and Homfris take their big boat on a five-hour trip to the mouth of the Orinoco River, sell its cargo to a Dutch ship that anchors there, and bring earnings back to the fishermen. Thus that single engine allows many local residents to commercialize their work.

"I'm thankful about that boat," said Mary Blendliss, a 59-year-old Moravian church and community leader, who sells plain and sweet coconut buns from a kitchen window. Behind her burns a wood-fire stove. Blendliss leans out the window and gestures at fishing nets and wooden lobster traps neighbours have received from the programme, drying now in a late afternoon sun. "With their fish the people eat my bread," she says. "And when the *Sun* comes back with the money for those who sell the fish, you bet I bake that day."

Like its sister settlements in the desembocadura, the village of Kara rises like an idyll above the river bank where we tie up, its wooden houses tall on their stilts, shutters open, the town a picture of tranquillity under palms that move softly in the breeze. Behind appearances, however, Kara suffers from serious illnesses that might be only minor annoyances in places where sanitation exists and basic medicines are handy. The grass between houses is pocked with damp holes residents ruefully call their "water wells," even as they fill with mud or swim with insects and tiny fish. Toilets or outhouses practically do not exist: groves and waterfronts are communal toilets.

"Diarrhoea is common, and sometimes kills the smallest children, even though we go house to house to tell people how to avoid it, to cover food, clean porches and use soap and water," said Neurith James, 19, a nurse's aide. "And most children suffer from some kind of respiratory ailment or another."

The new, two-room clinic built by PRORAAS stands locked and empty for the moment, as do clinics in two of the other villages. The problem is transportation. Only two boats are available to ship medicines provided by the government's health ministry from Bluefields to the desembocadura, according to

Lack of transport to local health clinics can be a matter of life or death. Above: Nora Alcira Chow and her grandmother.

Farfán: one was involved in a drug-trafficking incident so won't be used, and the other has engine trouble. After consulting with the Local Committees, PRORAAS decided to repair the boat with the faulty engine, a $3,700 job its skipper might never have afforded himself. Then the medicine and equipment will be on their way.

The urgent boat repair is an example of the small but vital assistance PRORAAS might be called on to extend at any moment to keep the wider programme running smoothly, or running at all. A more precisely planned effort was the paramedic's education of Neurith James himself, along with other youths chosen by Local Committees. After a year of classwork and internship on the PRORAAS scholarship, James returned to his village "to do what I can," despite the shortfall in supplies. Recently, he said, the shortfall was fatal, when a 75-year-old farmer was struck with diarrhoea one evening; because the ailment is so common, his wife notified no one until morning. A motor boat might have made a trip in 25 minutes to Karawala, where there was a doctor, critical rehydration salts and even rehydration equipment, but there is no motor boat in Kara. The old man died in the canoe.

There is no way any single assistance programme can make up for the Ministry of Health's lack of funds and personnel. Nevertheless, thousands who live in the jungle and these villages have been vaccinated and seen by doctors with assistance from PRORAAS, which provides the transportation and logistics for visits by the government's mobile medical teams. A grateful health official in Bluefields told me that help had made the difference between success and failure of one recent campaign.

For all the difficulty of life on the desembocadura, there is a sense that residents can attempt to solve their problems today in a way they could not do just a few years ago, because now at least there is an absence of war.

"I think we still lack reconciliation," Anglican Reverend Roberto Pantin told me in the town of Walpa, a Miskito village between Kara and La Barra. "And, little sister, I don't believe we can say the war will never return. We are still in pain, because many Indians were killed. But those times were so much worse than now."

Around us the leaves of the mango trees are turning a seasonal red, the same trees whose fruit sustained villagers for weeks at a time during the 1980s, when it was too dangerous to go out to the fields to harvest food. There is no sound of combat now, only the ringing of a venerable bell mounted near the open-walled shed that serves as Reverend Pantin's church, where a service is about to begin. Pantin's son Mario was only 18 when he died fighting on the northern Rio Coco, a sacred river to the Miskito. And Pantin's assassinated brother Eduardo had been one of the first guerrilla chiefs to sign a peace with the Sandinistas, a peace he believed would lead to autonomy. Today in Walpa, the blood has stopped flowing, and Pantin starts the service before a packed congregation.

"Let us give thanks," he intones.

The ride from the desembocadura back to Bluefields is rougher than the passage out had been the week before. The long, wide Pearl Lagoon, I suddenly realize, was not named for the texture of its surface: the wind is against us, and the chop lifts the prow of the boat alarmingly high before slamming it down hard, over and over again. In Sandy Bay a couple of days ago, the mother of a 16-month-old girl, Nora Alcira Chow, had begged us to take the toddler to Bluefields for a proper X-ray, after she fell from the house porch and by the look of it, broke a collar bone. Now here was little Nora, snuggled into the arms of her grandmother in the most stable, most aft section of the boat, sleeping soundly all the way. During lulls in the mad passage, the scenery is alluring. Along banks savaged by the elements, mangrove trees extend their spidery legs into the river, sending down roots, regenerating the soil. ■

Mary Jo McConahay, Central America editor for the Pacific News Service, is writing a book based on her personal accounts of issues facing the region's environment and its indigenous peoples.

CAIRO COUNTDOWN

Delegates from 185 UN Member States meet in September to set the world's population policy for the next 20 years. Questions loom on issues ranging from the position of the Catholic Church to the rights of women and the role of men.

United Nations, New York — Every year or so, thousands of grassroots activists and governmental delegates gather under the auspices of the United Nations to mend the fraying fabric of human society. Among the loose threads that continue to warrant attention are the environment, sustainable development, human rights, population, employment and the status of women. By reworking these strands, which vary in texture and hue, they hope to restore strength and splendor to the weave.

Activists and delegates will resume this task on 5 September , when the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) opens in Cairo. But as with the 1992 Earth Summit, or last year's parley on human rights, they may find it hard to handle such nettlesome issues in isolation.

"There is a growing understanding that population, development, the environment, human needs and social responsibilities are all tied together in a close web of interrelationships and interdependencies," says Nafis Sadik, executive director of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and secretary-general of the conference. "If you neglect only one aspect of this web, you imperil the total."

ICPD comes third in a series of conferences that began in Bucharest in 1974 and continued in Mexico City 10 years later. The first conference focused narrowly on population growth, while the second framed the debate more broadly around family planning.

Discussion at PrepCom3 — the third and final ICPD Preparatory Committee meeting, which convened at the UN in New York City last spring — suggests that recent social and political developments are again redefining the agenda. Three main issues are creating this change of focus.

First, the spread of HIV and AIDS, which was scarcely recognized in 1984, has drawn greater attention to sexually transmitted diseases. The latest draft of the ICPD Programme of Action calls on the international community to mobilize human and financial resources to reduce new HIV infections in developing countries, where four-fifths of AIDS cases occur, to half the currently projected rate by the year 2000. How to fund such an effort, as with family planning and primary health services, poses a formidable challenge for the Cairo conference.

Second, heightened awareness of maternal morbidity and mortality has also brought about a seismic shift in the population debate. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), five hundred million women suffer from reproductive tract infections, which can lead to infertility, cervical cancer and other life-threatening diseases, and in some cases contribute to infant death. Moreover, each year half a million women die from pregnancy-related causes. Ninety-nine per cent of these women live in the developing world, and 20-25 per cent of the deaths stem from unsafe, and often illegal, abortions.

By responding to the needs expressed by women, organizations such as the Bangladesh Women's Health Coalition have created a broad new spectrum of services known as reproductive health care. The World Health Organization has already embraced the concept of reproductive health, and many UN member states are beginning to follow suit.

Delegates from the Holy See, Honduras, Guatemala and Malta have expressed strong reservations about the reproductive health model, which asserts that men and women have a right "to be informed and to have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of fertility regulation of their choice." These methods, say the delegates, could be construed to include abortion.

Disagreement over this issue, which was not resolved at PrepCom3, is likely to be a flashpoint in Cairo, says Fred Sai from Ghana, chairman of the ICPD Preparatory Committee. Other contentious topics included reproductive rights, fertility regulation and safe motherhood.

Another issue that participants expect to figure more prominently in Cairo than in Mexico City or Bucharest is the relationship between population, environment and development. Many demographers, environmentalists and political leaders from Northern countries note that the world's population, now 5.7 billion, is increasing at a rate of 1 billion per decade. Such rapid growth, they say,

By Christopher Reardon

which is concentrated in the South, hampers development and strains the world's carrying capacity.

Advocates of reproductive health and human development, especially those from Southern countries, tend to disagree. The real environmental threat is northern consumption, they say. Industrial nations comprise 22 per cent of the world's population, according to UNFPA, but consume two-thirds of all resources and generate 75 per cent of all pollutants and wastes.

For James Gustave Speth, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), it is a question of mutual responsibility: "Bringing population numbers into balance with the coping capacities of society and the carrying capacities of nature is a fundamental challenge," he said in an address to PrepCom3. "Addressing the runaway consumption of resources in the industrial world is equally fundamental. Both will require international cooperation, and both will require sustainable human development."

As decision-makers gather in Cairo to grapple with these challenges, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) will be playing an unprecedented role. Representatives of NGOs have been brought on to many country delegations. What is more, a new accreditation policy has broadened access well beyond the international NGOs that hold consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. This move allows more NGOs to have direct input in drafting the Programme of Action.

Close to 600 local, national and regional NGOs were accredited by the end of PrepCom3. The final tally in Cairo may not exceed the number of activists who attended the Earth Summit, but their influence will be more direct than ever before.

Christopher Reardon is a freelance writer based in New York City.

CHOICES interviewed four spokespersons at PrepCom3 about what they hope to see achieved at the Cairo conference. Following are excerpts from their remarks.

Responding to women's needs

The Bangladesh Women's Health Coalition opened in 1980 as a single abortion clinic. Since then we have redefined our organization many times in order to meet the needs expressed by our clients.

"We hope to see women obtain the basic human right to get the services they want at a cost they can afford. To us, demographic and environmental concerns are secondary."

From the start, women told us that they didn't like to be seen entering our clinic because they might be stigmatized for having an abortion. We responded by broadening our focus and by promoting ourselves as a family-planning clinic.

Several months later, our clients asked us to provide basic health care services, including immunizations for their children. So we began providing maternal and child health care as well as family planning services.

In our third year, the women who visited our clinics said they wanted access to legal and other services under the same roof. Again we expanded our mission and dedicated ourselves to reproductive health and reproductive rights.

By listening closely to our clients, who numbered 110,000 last year, we have developed a broad spectrum of reproductive health services. The Ministry of Health and many NGOs, by comparison, have tended to focus narrowly on family planning or health care.

We continue to evolve. In 1984 the coalition introduced functional literacy programmes that are helping women read and write. Later we helped women pool their savings and make loans for small income-generating activities. Together with the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association, we offer classes on human rights and family law, including marriage, divorce, guardianship of children and inheritance.

As a national NGO, we engage in lobbying and advocacy work at all levels, from local to international. We hope to see reproductive health care integrated into other health services, to see women empowered, and to see women obtain the basic human right to get the services they want at a cost they can afford. To us, demographic and environmental concerns are secondary.

Our national family planning programme has been greatly influenced by donors who think numbers are the problem and individual human rights are secondary. For many years, agencies such as the US Agency for International Development required government family-planning workers to meet monthly targets by inserting so many IUDs, distributing so many condoms and undertaking so many sterilizations.

Pressure from the women's movement in Bangladesh helped remove these targets about three years ago. That's one step towards a more positive programme.

There are several things I want to see result from the Cairo conference. One is that reproductive health care and reproductive rights – as opposed to population or family planning – be a central part of the Programme for Action. Another is that reproductive health be recognized as a basic human right. And I want to see more discussion on the empowerment of women.

Also, I think the document should include stronger mechanisms for accountability. A complaints mechanism, starting with people who use services at the community level and leading all the way to the international level, is necessary. Finally, the United Nations should hold an accountability summit in the year 2000, where member states would report on what steps they have taken to implement the programmes of action adopted since the Earth Summit.
— Sandra Kabir, founder and executive director, Bangladesh Women's Health Coalition

The Church and reproductive rights

The Vatican's sudden opposition to the reproductive health model has taken me and many of my colleagues by absolute surprise. At none of the regional and subregional meetings did the Roman Catholic Church dominate the discussion the way it did at PrepCom3.

I'm concerned that the Vatican's pressure on Latin American delegations will water down the final document. Like the reversal of US policy on abortion 10 years ago, it could stop progress and delay reproductive and sexual health for millions of women.

The Colombian delegation has been largely silent. Perhaps they are showing respect for Vatican representatives at the UN to avoid conflict with Church officials at home. In Colombia, the conservative Church hierarchy has a lot of influence with the government. That is one reason why we have no national family planning programme.

Instead, NGOs do most of the work. Profamilia, which started in 1965, runs 48 clinics – eight of them for males only. Fifteen clinics have programmes for adolescents. Our social marketing programme helps distribute contraceptives through drugstores.

The contraceptive prevalence rate has reached 68 per cent, which is as high as in many developed countries. Eighty per cent of Catholics, who make up 95 per cent of the population, approve of contraception.

When the Pope came to Latin America in 1986, Colombia was the only country he visited where he did not speak out against contraception and family planning. He gave 27 speeches and never mentioned the issue. I think he saw that it would antagonize people.

It's important to recognize that the Church itself is divided on the subject of contraception. Many priests and nuns are deeply committed to the communities they work with. They're closer to the people, so they see the drama of human lives from a more practical perspective.

On many occasions parish priests have quietly asked us at Profamilia to provide local residents with information about contraception, or to teach sexual education in their schools. They are looking for solutions to the problems their communities face day after day.

Recently, the government launched a National Plan for Sexual Education that teaches students in primary and secondary schools about sexual issues and which, we hope, will decrease the number of unwanted pregnancies. The government also started a programme called "Health for Women, Women for Health," which promotes reproductive and sexual health.

Our delegates should be proud of these programmes. Instead they are quiet. Perhaps they feel it's more important to act than to argue over words.

But the distinction between the term "family planning," which we have outgrown, and the concepts of reproductive health and reproductive rights is an important one. Health and human rights should not depend on whether an individual has a family. I would like to see some recognition of that before we leave Cairo. **— Maria Isabel Plata, deputy executive director, Profamilia (Colombia)**

Involving men in family planning

We often hear a stereotype that men are irresponsible and unreceptive to the idea of family planning. Our research tells us that, in Zimbabwe anyway, this is not true.

When we give men information about family planning, we find them very willing to participate. One poll we conducted found that over 80 per cent of men are aware of family planning programmes and are willing to learn how to use contraceptives.

We identified the importance of including males in family planning as early as 1980. Men traditionally head the household in Zimbabwe. We agreed that if we failed to include them, our family planning programme would not stand much chance of success.

In 1988, we launched our first media campaign to increase men's responsibility for family planning. We tried to persuade men to become part of the decision-making process by talking to their partners about contraception and the number and spacing of children.

We broadcast talk shows and social dramas on television and radio in the principal languages: Shona, Ndebele and English. One of these dramatizations was called *Akarumwa Nechekuchera*, which means "Man is his own worst enemy." Nearly two-thirds of the men who tuned in to the show said it changed their attitude toward their family.

We also held a series of informal talks, using male educators, to inform and motivate men about family planning. Of the men who attended at least

"We often hear a stereotype that men are irresponsible and unreceptive to the idea of family planning. Our research tells us this is not true."

one of the talks, 17 per cent said they started using a family planning method. Some 40 per cent agreed that husbands and wives should make family-planning decisions together.

Last March we tried a new approach by sponsoring a Family Planning Challenge Cup, a series of soccer matches with players from the national team. We gave a condom to every man who came, and during half-time we performed giant puppet shows that emphasized the importance of teamwork in making decisions. The total attendance surpassed 150,000 people.

We are also selling posters, teeshirts and badges that feature photos of star players or use soccer metaphors. These slogans include "Play the game right," "It takes two" and "Do you have a dream?"

I'm hoping that the Programme of Action that comes out of Cairo will centre on women's reproductive health, education and services for men and adolescents. **— Florence Caikara, chief of information, education and communication, Zimbabwe National Family Planning Council**

Nine action steps for Cairo

The United States believes that the ICPD can help launch a renewed and revitalized process of development that is in the long-term interests of all nations.

Successfully realized, this concept of sustainable development will promote broad-based economic growth and protect the environment. It will enhance human capability and uphold democratic values. It will improve the quality of life for current generations and increase that opportunity for future generations.

What might we realistically define as a central agenda for the Cairo conference and for sustained, priority action into the 21st century?

First, a determined cooperative effort must be launched to make good quality, voluntary family planning and the full range of reproductive health services universally available early in the next century.

Investing in the wisdom of women is a second priority. As recent reports have indicated and common sense tells us, gender equity in education promises to yield enormous dividends for both our population and development objectives.

Third, all countries should assess the extent of unmet need for prenatal care, childbirth care, immunizations and the monitoring of growth and development — paying particular attention to the most vulnerable and underserved groups.

Fourth, we can reinforce health, education and economic objectives by paying special attention to the needs of young women and men. In addition to emphasizing to adolescents the importance of interpersonal relationships and the responsibilities of sexuality, we need to have girls recognized for their full social and economic potential.

Fifth, as women are empowered, so we must empower — some would say enlighten — men to act on their responsibilities related to fertility, sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Sixth, must encourage responsible, mutually respectful sexual behaviour among both men and women and teach the importance of such behaviour to both boys and girls.

Seventh, any discussion of responsibility must also include emphasis on the family. Strengthening the family and intergenerational bonds and engaging citizens in their communities are ideas with greater currency today than ever before.

Eighth, we need to take the opportunity to discuss today's unprecedented migrations of human populations around the world. Two aspects of this problem are particularly relevant to the ICPD: the link between environmental degradation and migration and the potential effect of development programmes on population movements.

Finally, together we are nurturing North-South relationships that recognize the mutually reinforcing roles and responsibilities of all countries for sustainable development.

In the North, a commitment is necessary to help provide the financial wherewithal to realize an integrated global population strategy, and to take on the difficult issue of wasteful resource consumption and the disproportionate impact the developed world has on the Earth's environment.

In the South, a corresponding commitment is needed to make family planning, health care and women's empowerment among the highest national priorities.

If Cairo would launch action on these challenges, we could make significant progress toward stabilizing the world's population, improving the quality of life for millions of individuals and realizing the promise of sustainable development. **— Timothy Wirth, under-secretary of state for foreign affairs, United States government** ■

The GOOD NEWS About POPULATION GROWTH

Global population is growing at an ominous pace. Yet new opportunities, if they are seized, along with changes in government policies, could help solve the population problem within two generations.

By George Moffett

Three facts of profound consequence await the attention of delegates from 185 countries who will converge in Cairo in September to discuss the impact of population growth on economic and human development:

◆ The countries of the developing world already contain three-quarters of humanity and will soon be home to nine of every 10 people on Earth.

◆ With but a small fraction of the world's GNP, a tiny percentage of its scientists, the lion's share of its debt and nearly all of its abject poor, these countries have been ill-equipped to absorb the dramatic increases in human numbers that, despite the steadily declining *rate* of global population growth, has occurred since the end of World War II.

◆ Within the next 60 years, between three and seven billion more people will be added to the population of the developing world, according to the United Nations' most likely scenario. Assuming they can sustain such increases, developing countries will double or triple in size before their populations are stabilized a century or more from now. If they cannot, and population size outstrips the resources available to support it, population growth will be slowed faster and sooner, on nature's grim terms.

Such facts, striking as they are, do not *have* to have apocalyptic implications. Time and again history has demonstrated the potential of human ingenuity to redeem humankind from the consequences of rapid population growth, and it can do so again. Even so, the delegates to the Cairo conference can ignore only at their peril the circumstances that threaten to separate what *can* be done to mitigate the effects of such growth from what is *likely* to be done in many or most poor countries.

The conventional wisdom is that because rapid population growth lowers per capita expenditures on education, per capita access to renewable natural resources, and per capita savings rates, it retards economic and social development. But the problem goes beyond this conventional wisdom. There is a lethal synergy that exists in dozens of developing countries between the sheer speed of population growth, on the one hand, and inappropriate government policies that magnify its negative effects, on the other. The former is suggested by the fact that the populations of most developing countries are projected to double in size in 30 years or less. The latter is evident in policies that have prevented many developing countries from either slowing such growth or accommodating it gracefully.

It would stretch the capacities of even the most prosperous countries if they had to accommodate the kind of population growth expected in regions including sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Without the benefit of prosperity, the indispensable requirement will be for governments to formulate policies that will alleviate rather than exacerbate the economic and social effects of rapid population growth. But as examples from around the developing world illustrate, such policies are in short supply. In Africa, food supplies are inadequate partly because of a pervasive urban bias that leaves farmers with few incentives to produce. In dozens of command economies, housing for low-income families is limited because of anachronistic rent control

laws, which have discouraged private developers from building new residential housing units. In other developing countries, significant resources that could be invested in education are diverted for military use. In few of these countries is rapid population growth the main factor retarding economic growth. But in most, such growth has exacerbated the negative effects of short-sighted policies and it will likely do so to a greater degree in the future, for reasons ranging from inexperience in self-government to political opportunism to bureaucratic ineptitude.

High political and institutional barriers thus separate what *can* be done to mitigate the effects of rapid population growth from what is *likely* to be done in all too many countries. That's the bad news the delegates to Cairo will have to face as they grapple with the problem of rapid population growth. The good news is that where such barriers have been lowered by far-sighted governments, the results have been hopeful and in some cases dramatic. Sustained high agricultural growth has taken place, for example, in a number of countries – Cameroon, China, Indonesia and Thailand, to name four – where constraints on small-scale agriculture have been removed. Significant progress has also been achieved by some of the thousands of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are playing an increasingly important role in solving population-related problems at the local level in developing countries around the world. This is illustrated by two notable examples, from Kenya and Bangladesh.

In Kenya, smallholder farmers working the semi-arid land of Machakos district have been taught the basic skills of harvesting scarce water, composting, and "alley-cropping" fields with trees that provide a natural source of nutrients for overworked soil. Agronomists attached to private institutions like the University of Nairobi have helped the farmers double the output of crops like maize, beans and millet. This has made the once-barren reaches of Machakos food self-sufficient. It also provides one of the keys to the food future of a country which, despite an impressive recent drop in fertility, is still expected to double in size within a generation.

The empowerment of women — through education and access to credit, for example — is recognized as a key to limiting family size.

Creating a sense of a future that extends beyond mere day-to-day survival has changed the context for decisions about family size.

In Bangladesh, meanwhile, the innovative work of two other well-known NGOs – the Grameen Bank and the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee – has helped to unleash the productive potential of scores of thousands of poor women, with clear implications not only for economic development but also for fertility reduction. Researchers say the "micro-enterprise" loans given by the banks have changed attitudes towards childbearing by empowering women, raising the "opportunity costs" of having large families and producing a greater degree of parity in marriage

relationships. Creating a sense of a future that extends beyond mere day-to-day survival has changed the context for decisions about family size.

Nor is the work of NGOs the only hopeful development weighing in the balance against unprecedented increases in population that are all but certain to occur over the next few decades. As the 21st century approaches there is a heartening convergence of factors that augur well for stabilizing global population, sooner perhaps than experts would have thought possible even a decade ago.

The most consequential factor may be the growing desire on the part of men and women around the world for access to family planning services. Fertility surveys conducted in dozens of developing countries indicate that well over 100 million women who now have no access to convenient, affordable family planning services would like to space their children or to stop having children altogether. Millions more, including sexually active young people and couples discouraged from practising family planning by the poor quality of existing services, could be reached by well-run family planning programmes, especially those sensitive to the reproductive health needs of women. Family planning agencies are confident that, in the process of satisfying the existing demand for family planning services, they can create new demand by improving the quality of services and legitimizing the small-family model.

Across the institutional spectrum, from national governments in rich and poor nations alike, to giant multilateral institutions like the UN and the World Bank, there is a growing recognition that the future will pose far greater challenges to the human race if rates of population growth are not slowed further. Significantly, that conclusion has recently been endorsed by a growing number of natural scientists who now warn that, without global efforts to slow population growth, science and technology may not be able to redeem the future from want and hunger. In the most widely-noted warning, issued in 1992, the US National Academy of Sciences and the Royal Academy of London predicted that if current population and consumption trends continue, "science and technology may not be able to prevent either irreversible degradation of the environment or continued poverty for much of the world."

Jørgen Schytte

An integrated care centre in Cairo, Egypt, a principally Muslim country that has strong clerical support for family planning.

There is a heartening convergence of factors that augur well for stabilizing global population, sooner perhaps than experts would have thought possible even a decade ago.

"It is not prudent to rely on science and technology alone to solve the problem created by rapid population growth, wasteful resource consumption, and poverty," concurs a report by 56 national academies of science issued in October 1993.

There are other grounds for cautious hope in the current political moment. For one thing, as Johns Hopkins University expert Phyllis Piotrow has noted, for the first time there is no nation (like the United States during the Reagan and Bush administrations) or group of nations (like the communist bloc during the 1970s) that stands in the way of the objective of slowing global population growth. For another, the barrier of reli-

gious opposition to family planning has dropped – if not at the clerical level at least in the practice of tens of millions of lay believers around the world who have been compelled by the forces of modernization and urbanization to join the global contraceptive revolution that began during the late 1960s.

In Latin America, rates of contraceptive use among men and women, who in every other respect regard themselves as faithful Catholics, are as high as or higher than those of non-Catholics. The lowest birthrates and highest contraceptive use rates on record have been achieved in Catholic Italy, where abortion is also widely favoured as a back-up in case of contraceptive failure. Similar attitudes are found in the Islamic crescent, where rapid population growth has prompted theologians to accent a more permissive side of their theology with respect to the use of modern contraceptives. The results have been strong clerical support for family planning programmes in countries like Tunisia and Egypt. Even in Iran, that bastion of Shiite fundamentalism, the mathematics of fixed oil revenues divided by swelling populations have led to the establishment of one of the most aggressive family planning programmes in the region.

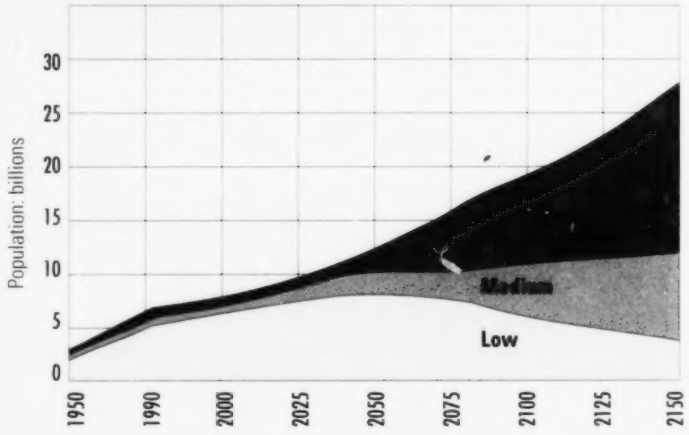
"Fifty years ago, a *mufti* [religious scholar] would have said that family planning is infidelism and paganism," says Egypt's senior Islamic cleric, Mohammed Sayeed Tantawi, whose support has been crucial in legitimizing Egypt's family planning programme in the eyes of millions of Muslim faithful. "But the world has changed more in the past 50 years than in the thousand years before. Fifty years ago, the population of Egypt was six million. Today there are 60 million Egyptians living on the same amount of land. So family planning is necessary."

Beyond the diminished *obstacles* to progress is the increased *opportunity* for progress that has been created by the end of the cold war. Freed from the necessity of concentrating on geostrategic threats to peace, policymakers now have the luxury of turning their attention to the global forces that impinge on the peace and prosperity of nations, including the pressure population growth is placing on economic development, food supplies and the natural environment. Worried that such pressures could destabilize the governments of poor nations, prompt interstate conflict over scarce resources, and spur disruptive movements of populations into urban areas or across national frontiers, Western analysts are even now thinking of ways to retool foreign policy to cope with the proliferating number of local threats.

One crucial task will be to monitor environmental and economic conditions around the developing world and to provide early warning of regional conflicts. More difficult to implement will be longer-range approaches, including a refashioning of the international trading system to provide more equity to poor nations.

If political leaders are willing and able to capitalize on the opportunity provided by the coming together of this extraordinary constellation of circumstances, the population problem could be solved within two generations. If they are not, providing for the welfare of humanity in the century ahead will be more difficult; perhaps, in some of the world's poorest regions, it will prove impossible. ■

Alternative futures: population projections to 2150



Low, medium and high populations projections by the United Nations. By 2050 there is a difference of 4 billion between high and low projections — about the size of world population in 1975.

Source: United Nations Population Division

George Moffett is a diplomatic correspondent for The Christian Science Monitor. *He is author of the just-released* Critical Masses: The Global Population Challenge *published by Viking Press, which was written while he was a visiting scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars in Washington, DC.*

Georgia: BALANCING ACTS

Following independence from the former Soviet Union, Georgia has confronted one crisis after another. Today the country hopes to build on a fragile peace and secure a more stable future.

Klaus Reisinger / Black Star

By Andrew Meier

Tbilisi — Early one Saturday morning, Eduard A. Shevardnadze, best known to the West as Mikhail Gorbachev's enlightened foreign minister, is tired. Few Georgians work weekends, but the Georgian president is in his office by 8:30 a.m., seven days a week, to greet the daily stream of diplomats, relief experts and the occasional trickle of intrepid Western businessmen. At 66, his grey streak wider and his eyes baggier than when he helped redraw the map of Central Europe, Shevardnadze concedes his hands are full as he tries to bind his homeland together after two years of internecine warfare. "We are still caught in a cycle of crises," he sighs straight off.

Of the 15 former Soviet republics, none has fallen further or faster than Georgia. Lying between the Caucasus Mountains and the Black Sea, at the heart of what Shevardnadze calls the "crescent of conflict" that spreads along the southern edge of the old USSR, Georgia is one of the world's oldest nation-states. Christianity dates here from 337 A.D., and for thousands of years Georgians managed to preserve their distinct heritage despite repeated invasions by Mongols, Persians and Turks.

However, since declaring independence in April 1991, the country of 5.5 million has endured one trauma after another: a coup d'etat, a war for secession, a deluge of refugees, a civil war and now, an economy in shambles that has forced it into an uncomfortable bear hug with Russia.

But this is a new spring and Shevardnadze at last is breathing a bit easier. His rival for the Georgian throne, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, is dead, reportedly having committed suicide last December. And the twin conflicts in Abkhazia and Mingrelia in western Georgia that have divided the country into three dusty war zones are frozen for the time being in a fragile peace monitored by UN observers.

Despite the ceasefire, Georgia now drifts in an uneasy limbo. "You can't

B. Norstrom / UNHCR

Above: *Tens of thousands of people have fled ethnic fighting in Abkhazia, which fell to separatists last October.* ***Left:*** *The destruction in Abkhazia was immense: a bridge over the Inguri River.*

call it a war," says Marta Ruedas, the first representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) here, "but you can't call it a peace either."

In the capital, Tbilisi, signs of Georgia's recent upheaval abound. Visit any apartment house and you find refugees living with relatives. Sidewalks brim with hungry families hawking their reserves – everything from chandeliers to tires to the kitchen sink. The shortage of gasoline and fear of crime conspire to keep the streets empty at night. In recent months, however, Shevardnadze has ordered a crackdown, capturing large armories and importing swank new police cars. At last, the spiralling crime rate shows signs of abating.

"For starters, the gun battles have stopped," one government official assures you, ticking off a list of incentives for foreign business. It may take another generation to bring Georgia into the club of European democracies, but the country at last appears ready to exit its state of siege, and to take a few tentative steps towards Shevardnadze's vision of a stable society ruled by law.

Amidst the scars of war there are other, faint signs of a second, more cautious, beginning. Soldiers – still in uniform, but mostly without *Kalashnikovs* – now walk arm in arm by the scorched shells of buildings that line Rustaveli Prospekt, Tbilisi's main boulevard. Ruined 19th century landmarks are now slowly being rebuilt, albeit with Russian brick replacing Italian marble. And a few artists have reappeared to sell their paintings on the steps of the central post office.

Critical to Georgia's transition from war, a UN-sanctioned peacekeeping force made up of soldiers from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was recently deployed on either side of the Inguri River, which forms the border between Georgia and Abkhazia. And in March, Shevardnadze returned from the United States bearing US$70 million in further American aid, bringing the total to $233 million over the past two years. In return for recently joining the CIS, Shevardnadze also secured a 10 billion ruble credit. Thanks to this hefty advance and the long list of relief agencies now in residence, Georgia has skirted the brink of yet another calamity.

Joe Lemonnier

But the emergency relief network, led by representatives of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNICEF and the World Food Programme, who have been working here since last summer, has given rise to a new concern. "We are afraid of the country's potential to become dependent on aid," says Michel Meyer, head of the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) delegation in Georgia. "That's why we usually work through the staff of the Georgian Red Cross. We are training them, because we are not here for long," he adds. Shevardnadze, accordingly, is now seeking long-term development over further humanitarian relief.

In January, as the country moved closer to stability, UNDP joined other UN staff in Tbilisi. With a modest budget of $1.4 million over the next two years and a local staff of six, the organization has a unique and challenging mission.

"As is the case with all the former Soviet states, Georgia wanted to become a member of the UN 'club,' and obviously they must have some benefit from that. UNDP helps them to open windows on the rest of the world," says Yves de San, former deputy head of UNDP's division for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, who led the first UNDP mission into Georgia in 1992.

"Another advantage to having a presence in the region is that it will facilitate assistance from bilateral donors. UNDP will help in the formulation of projects and delivery of funds from external sources," he adds.

In May, UNDP sent a mission to work with the Georgian government on a management plan for foreign assistance. "The country has no experience in the management of international relations," says de San. "It's a new job to be learned. The country needs a policy framework, a training action plan and implementation to support their management, as opposed to just being told what to do by foreign donors."

Ruedas has plunged right in, but she has not had an easy time. Though fluent in Russian and familiar with post-Soviet realities after a recent two-year tenure

in UNDP's office in Mongolia, she has found it difficult to decipher the government's plans.

"In Mongolia you had the Soviet problems, but at least you had a coherent government," she explains. "Here there's no unified government, not a whole lot of public support, and not much implementation of government policy."

Across town, Shevardnadze's office in the former Institute of Marxism-Leninism has a provisional ambiance that betrays the flux pervading his government and the country. The long marble corridors are dark, the sprawling offices frigid, and the phones have trouble making a connection across town. The government, it seems, is not immune to the crises that have paralyzed its populace in its first years of independence.

Fuel and electricity remain in short supply. Even the state television channel is able to broadcast only two hours a day. In the late 1980s, Georgia relied on imports for 80 to 85 per cent of its energy demand. Now the fuel supply from Russia and Azerbaijan has decreased, and a litre of gasoline in Tbilisi costs 50 cents, four times the price in Baku, in neighbouring Azerbaijan. Higher fuel prices, naturally, have led to higher food prices.

The flood of refugees has filled every corner of the country. The Hotel Iveria, once the pride of the local Intourist Bureau, now houses more than a thousand refugees. Fearing what they claim is a campaign of "ethnic cleansing," tens of thousands fled Abkhazia, with hundreds starving to death in the forbidding mountain region of Swanetia. The hotel, like every building in the city, is dimly lit and prone to blackouts. Its balconies are filled with washing, its courtyard, with children in search of a playground. On the tenth floor, you find a family of six living in a single room, having escaped the Abkhazian capital of Sukhumi when it fell to the separatists last October.

To some, ethnic conflict was the expected offspring of Georgia's sudden freedom from Soviet rule. Taslimur Rahman, who heads the UNHCR office here, searches for precedents to describe the conflict and its aftermath. "Internally displaced persons are not refugees per se, according to the 1951 definition, but of course we have concerns and we have been given a mandate here by the UN Secretary-General." The map of Georgia that decorates Rahman's wall is divided by seven colours, one for each minority in the country: Abkhazians, Georgians, Armenians, Greeks, Azeris, Ossetians and Russians.

"In Abkhazia the destruction was immense," he says. "Everything that existed within two and half kilometres of the road, if it belonged to a hostile group, was shelled or burned — by both sides."

Growing up amidst the communal violence of Bangladesh, Rahman was once a refugee himself. "But this conflict is different," he says. "Seventy years of socialist rule did not allow minds to develop. They still like to sling a gun and go around behaving like cavalrymen in medieval times. But now they are learning."

Despite the inescapable evidence of recent turmoil, Georgian businessmen look to the potential of the past. Only a few years ago, Georgian entrepreneurs would wine and dine a foreign visitor, toasting the imminent bloom of a "second Switzerland." From the magnificent peaks of the Caucasus Mountains to the lush Black Sea Coast, Georgia enjoyed a well-deserved reputation as the premier Soviet resort. The land was rich in sweet wine, spicy dishes, hospitality and sunshine. Tbilisi, with its medieval churches and cobblestone back streets was known to cure even the most homesick of Moscow-weary Westerners.

War and crime, however, have had a debilitating effect on the economy. In Tbilisi, which even in the communist era was a haven for traders adept at dodging the strictures of the Soviet command economy, you find little of the sidewalk trade that dominates Moscow's post-communist landscape.

Few of his countrymen envy Shevardnadze's perch over a country rent by war and convulsing under a collapsed economy. Few could have foreseen the cycle of division and subdivision that pulled nearly half the country out of his control for most of his tenure. Nor could they have predicted that the man who headed the Georgian Communist Party a decade ago now keeps a silver icon of the Madonna and child in the corner of his office.

Divine intervention aside, long-term development is needed to lift the country from its knees. But devising an economic strategy amidst the detritus of Georgia's Soviet-era infrastructure and fractious parliament has proven problematic. Despite joining the CIS, Georgia has refrained from rejoining the ruble zone, opting instead to print coupons in April 1993. In Tbilisi's barren shops, prices are listed in rubles, but you must pay in *kupony*. As painful reminders of the price of independence, the coupons are treated with disdain and used only to buy newspapers and bread. As one hoary street vendor laughed, watching her coupons blow away in the wind, "It's just paper."

Real trade, for the fortunate few, is done in dollars. An average monthly salary in February 1994 was 120,000 coupons, or a kilogram of onions. Optimists in the government will assure you

Unless something starts happening in the way of economic development,

Eric Lars Bakke / Black Star

An average monthly salary last winter was 120,000 Georgian coupons, or a kilogram of onions.

that there is no hyperinflation. But in one week in March, the coupon fell from a rate of $1-to-250,000 to $1-to-375,000.

In this transitional period, Shevardnadze's advisers foster few illusions about the importance of foreign assistance. "We need to make our own way, but unfortunately we cannot do it all alone," concedes Irakly Menagarishvili, deputy prime minister and one of the government's most respected reformers.

Ask relief workers here about Georgia's chances for development, and you will hear a chorus of cautious optimism. Akram Ali Eltom directs Save the Children's field office in Tbilisi, which also serves as a clearinghouse for a dozen other aid agencies in the country. The informal consortium, Eltom reports, has delivered food, medicine, soap, clothing and blankets "all the way down the distribution line."

Although the country remains in crisis, most aid workers agree the time has come to look down the road, and that Georgia's needs can only be met through development. "The absence of a legal framework, for example, poses a serious obstacle," says Eltom. "It is hard to provide small business assistance without a commercial code."

"The government has problems up to here," attests Michel Meyer of the IFRC, raising his hand above his head. "And they have very few means. It's an open field for development assistance, from private farming to psychiatric hospitals."

On the bright side, Georgia has maintained a highly-educated workforce. The intelligentsia, despite its dependence on Moscow and distance from the West, persevered and nourished a Western European culture. "Ninety per cent of the members of our new political parties come from the intelligentsia," Shevardnadze reports. "We have tremendous intellectual resources. Without heat, without electricity, doctors and professors continue their work. People may be starving, but they do not abandon their laboratories."

UNDP is one of the few agencies looking at Georgia's broader horizon. Despite the difficulty of setting up a development programme under such tenuous circumstances, Ruedas has identified three potential areas for action: small-to-medium enterprise development, the creation of a social safety net, and the reintegration of displaced persons back to their homes in the Gali region of Abkhazia.

As of yet there is no safety net for Georgia's most vulnerable groups, which comprise at least 40 per cent of the population. In February, the average monthly pension equalled just 10 cents. "That's enough to buy one plastic bag in the market, but not to put anything in it," notes Leopoldo Principe, who heads the International Committee of the Red Cross delegation here.

And although impressive plans for privatization were announced as early as 1992, war impeded their implementation. Of 4,950 government enterprises, only 902 had been privatized as of February. "Part of our mandate is employment creation," Ruedas explains, "and unless something starts happening in the way of economic development, there's going to be a need for humanitarian assistance forever. Not just for displaced persons, but for the whole population when their resources run out, which is not likely to be far in the future."

Everywhere in Georgia you see depictions of St. George on horseback trampling the dragon, and the country may well face further demons. Having entered into an uneasy embrace with Russia, Shevardnadze still yearns for a united, stable nation that incorporates Abkhazia. It is a vision that demands a central role for development. "For Shevardnadze to succeed," comments Gia Nodia, a prominent scholar and one of the most trusted interpreters of Georgian politics, "development projects and democratic institutions must take hold. But, so far, there's no certainty of that happening anytime soon."

Few things are certain in Georgia today, and few dare to try to describe what is happening here. Some lament that Shevardnadze is growing too powerful, others fear that if he leaves Georgia will unravel. But one resident offered the best description for the country's current crawl from war to peace, from chaos toward stability: "Revolution," he said with a wry smile, "alongside evolution." ■

Andrew Meier, a freelance journalist based in San Francisco, writes on a variety of cultural and Russian-related topics. His work has appeared in The New York Times, The New Republic *and* Moscow Magazine.

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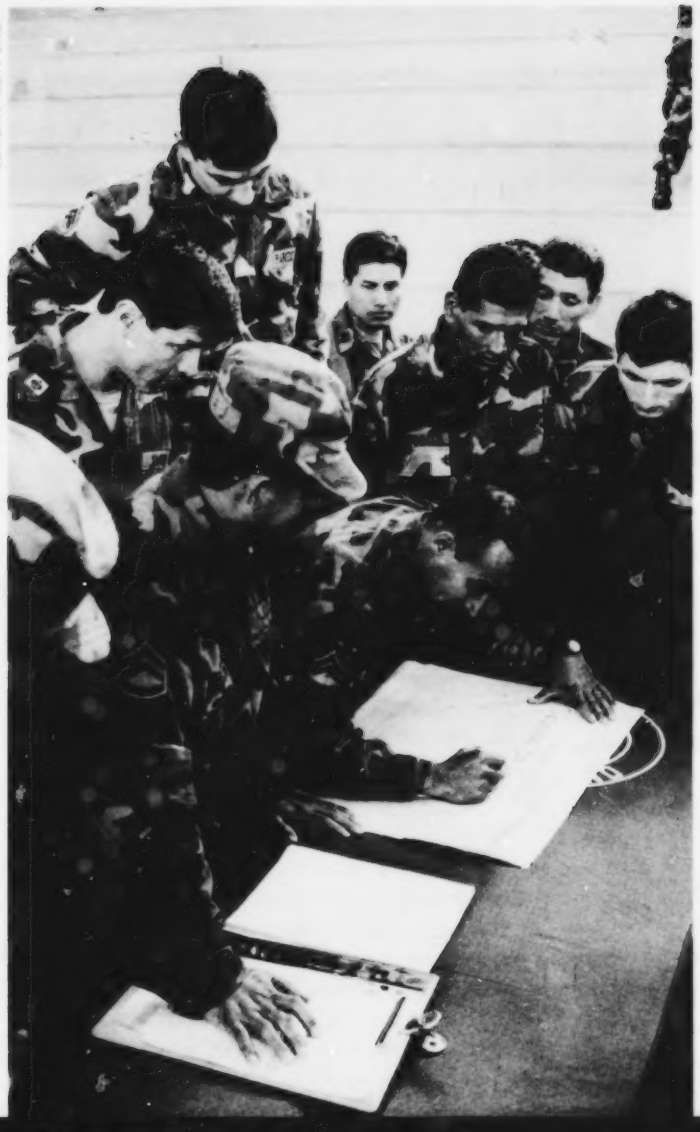


Sarita Kendall / UNDP

Ecuadorean soldiers draw up a list of women's rights.

BASIC TRAINING IN HUMAN RIGHTS

AN UNUSUAL PARTNERSHIP IS UNDER WAY BETWEEN ECUADOR'S MILITARY AND AN INDEPENDENT HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATION.

BY SARITA KENDALL

Quito – With microphone in hand and an old Mauser rifle slung across his chest, an Ecuadorean corporal made a convincing case for the rights of subversives before a crowd of soldiers. Putting himself in the shoes of a guerrilla fighter, he argued for fair trial, social integration and even the take-over of the state. The last point brought a burst of criticism and commentary, until the human rights specialist conducting the session made the distinction between aiming to subvert the state and having the right to do so. From the back a soldier piped up that subversives have no rights anyway because they are outside the law.

It was an unexpectedly open, lively discussion, all the more surprising because it took place inside an army barracks near Quito, the capital of Ecuador. The soldiers were the first of some 6,000 army personnel taking part in a human rights education programme that got under way earlier this year, spearheaded by the United

Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Ecuador's armed forces have never been associated with the fierce repression typical of some Latin American countries, and the current minister of defence, General José Gallardo, is a soft-spoken, thinking man who gets carried away by subjects like reforestation and job training.

General Gallardo said that when he became minister he decided to give special attention to human rights. "I felt it was necessary to cultivate respect for people's rights in the armed forces, not just because there might be failings, but because such respect must spring from each person's conscience. It's impossible to watch every man... each must be his own judge."

The armed forces – comprised of the army, navy and air force, but not the police – have had a high profile in Ecuador, not least because of a long-standing border dispute with Peru. Ecuador was ruled by a military regime from 1972 to 1979, a period when the sudden rush of oil income produced big changes and allowed significant investments in transport, urban infrastructure and energy projects. The process of return to democratic rule was a complex one with constitutional reforms leading up to the election of a civilian president in 1979.

Since that time the military has been treated as a sort of political thermometer by democratic governments. The fractioning of political parties and the impossibility of maintaining parliamentary coalitions have made it difficult to carry through government programmes. At such times when the executive and congress are at loggerheads, ministers are constantly threatened with impeachment and legislation is stymied.

Among the tasks assigned to the armed forces by Ecuador's Constitution is the preservation of democracy. Yet there is some confusion among both soldiers and civilians as to what this should mean and how the military can contribute to the construction of a democratic society with full respect for people's rights. This, then, is the framework for the education project, which is being carried out by a Quito-based Latin American human rights organization known by its Spanish acronym as ALDHU, with a grant of US$43,000 from UNDP.

"RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS MUST SPRING FROM EACH PERSON'S CONSCIENCE. IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO WATCH EVERY MAN."

Mario Salzmann, the UNDP resident representative in Ecuador, mingled among the soldiers and officers at the first workshop, which took place last February. "The issue of human rights is central to everything the United Nations stands for," he said. "Human development demands respect for the rights of individuals, and the project is trying to instil such concepts in a country where the armed forces have considerable contact with civilians. Today it is in a social context, but tomorrow there could be conflict."

Salzmann says the project is the only one of its kind that teams together an NGO and the armed forces as development partners.

Friction between human rights organizations and the military is to be expected in any country. One example is the bloody incident that occurred last January on the Putumayo frontier between Ecuador and Colombia, when 11 Ecuadorean military and police officers travelling in river boats were killed by Colombian guerrillas. The military arrested about 30 people living in the frontier area and, by most accounts, several were tortured; investigations were launched. Memories of the case were still fresh at the time of the first workshop, and soldiers and officers were indignant that, after the event, human rights workers seemed more concerned about the alleged torture of guerrilla suspects than the deaths of their comrades.

Ecuador's armed forces rank high on the list of nationally respected institutions, however. It is the politicians, the police and the judiciary who are more often criticized. Of all human rights violations reported in 1993, the police were cited in 50 per cent of the cases and the military in only seven per cent.

The initiative started with a seminar for senior officers in the army, navy and air force, followed by an education campaign in army schools and barracks around the country. Not everyone in or outside the armed forces was happy with the idea. Some people said the project was simply an army public relations exercise; some criticized ALDHU for working with state institutions, and others criticized the army command for making an agreement with an independent human rights organization.

All this faded into the background during the workshop as corporals and

sergeants drew up lists of rights for women, Indians and other groups. There were particularly heated arguments as to what rights the "illegal" sectors – criminals, homosexuals, subversives – should have. Another theme that raised passions and grievances was the rights of the military: the first point on this agenda was equal conditions for all classes within the armed forces, while the next called for judges to protect soldiers accused of human rights abuses.

A discussion on democracy was absorbed with eager attention. "If people are dying of hunger, that's not democracy... so there's no democracy in Latin America," said one soldier. "The rich and the powerful are not judged equally with a person lower down... this isn't a democratic country," said another. At the end of the day a corporal summed up: "The part about democracy was especially interesting. I don't think the army should kneel down and watch politicians destroy the country – we shouldn't govern, but we should somehow correct these things."

The officers, on the other hand, were much more inhibited, though subjects like national security, the death penalty (which doesn't exist in Ecuador) and the Putumayo incident stimulated some discussion. "We're not a repressive force; our task is mainly providing security. We're not looking for votes but fulfilling our mission," said a senior officer.

On the whole, Ecuador's armed forces are proud of their relations with the community and their development role, which ranges from the ownership of industrial companies to building local schools. In more remote parts of the country – particularly Amazon frontier areas – the army is often the only state presence, and this has led to problems and abuses. According to CONAIE, one of several organizations representing indigenous populations, a number of Indians have been injured in confrontations with the military over the last few months.

The worst incidents occurred during the Indian uprising of 1990, which involved protests over land rights and other issues. A Quito church was occupied and main roads throughout the Andean highlands were blocked. Indian communities were militarized and the Indian "threat" played up. Quito was flooded with soldiers again in 1992, when Indians marched in from the provinces to protest the commemoration of Columbus and 500 years of conquest. Yet in spite of past tensions, the rightful demands of Indians were clearly identified among those that participated in the human rights workshop: the group of soldiers that drew up the list unanimously agreed that land – meaning land reform and legal tenure to long-settled Indian territories – should be item number one.

Lorena Fries, the project coordinator, was encouraged by the initial response. "If they take up the human rights question and the idea of social diversity, I'm satisfied. It's not only the content of what's said that matters, but the opening of a series of themes related to human rights and democracy. You could see the soldiers were thinking and receptive to ideas surrounding these subjects."

The education project will continue during 1994, finishing with a poster and information campaign targeted at civilians. Although the overall goal is to improve the human rights situation in Ecuador and work towards a more democratic culture, other benefits are likely. More open dialogue between military personnel and civilians is anticipated, for example, as well as a second project phase in which human rights and related themes will be incorporated into the training curriculum for officers.

It is hoped that the personal commitment of General Gallardo and the genuine interest shown by the troops in this pioneering effort will produce tangible results, such as fewer cases of abuse or torture, as well as longer-term changes in attitude towards human rights. Another important development is the possibility of a similar project with the police, who have a dubious human rights reputation and are in close daily contact with civilians.

Ecuador is often referred to as an island of peace. But this is largely due to the fact that the military has not been forced into heavy repression by insurgency, which has never developed beyond occasional, ineffectual attempts at revolutionary violence. Eventually, it is hoped, lessons from this important initiative will be applied successfully in countries with far graver problems. ■

Brazilian-born journalist Sarita Kendall is a correspondent for The Financial Times. *She lives in Bogotá, Colombia.*

EARLY WARNINGS FROM SMALL ISLANDS

ISLANDS IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD FACE GRAVE ECOLOGICAL THREATS AND ARE MICROCOSMS OF THE WORLD AS A WHOLE. WE IGNORE THEIR PLIGHT AT OUR OWN RISK. GEOFFREY LEAN REPORTS FROM A RECENT CONFERENCE IN BARBADOS.

BRIDGETOWN — Far out in the Pacific Ocean, almost astride the equator and roughly equidistant from Sydney, Tokyo and Honolulu, the tip of an ancient volcano rises from the waves to provide a lonely warning to the world. Soaring more than 4,000 metres from its resting place in the depths, it breaks through the surface to form the tragic island nation of Nauru.

This round speck of land — little more than 20 square kilometres in the vastness of the ocean — was once so lovely that sailors named it "Pleasant Island." Kinza Clodumar, special adviser to its president, describes how it used to be "hung with fruits and flowers, vines and orchids, filled with birds of every description." But now, he continues, "thanks to human avarice, greed and shortsightedness," all that is left is "a mute graveyard of the lush rainforest that once graced our island." Heavy machinery has stripped bare virtually Nauru's entire surface to a depth of 13 metres to extract phosphate, enriching its people, but reducing the island to, in the presidential adviser's words, "a desert of jagged, coral pinnacles, uninhabitable, unusable, a ghostly array of tombstones baking in the equatorial sun." Its 7,000 people are now crowded into a tiny coastal strip, making it one of the most densely populated areas in the world. And the phosphate is about to run out.

Illustration by Kurt Vargo

Kinza Clodumar told the story of his island to the rest of the world at a special UN conference in Barbados last spring. And he warned: "We represent a small capsule in which all the world's problems are magnified many times. Nauru's fate is shared, to a greater or lesser extent, with the planet as a whole. As we go, so goes the planet – unless our lessons are learned well, and heeded."

He could have been speaking for many of the nations at the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island States, the most important assembly on the environment and development since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. For, as he put it, the world's small islands are the "frontline states" in the world ecological crisis.

At first sight most of the world's 42 small island developing states (SIDS) – which range from St. Lucia to Samoa, from Mauritius to Malta – seem unusually blessed, and not just for their natural beauty. On average, islands with less than a million people enjoy a per capita income of about US$4,000 a year – more than four times as great as the average level for developing countries as a whole, and more than 16 times higher than that of the least developed countries, the poorest on Earth. Nevertheless, they receive proportionately seven times more overseas aid – at an average of $145 a year for each of their people – than developing countries as a whole.

Money, of course, is not everything, as the Human Development Index of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) takes care to register. But the SIDS score high here too. They occupy nine of the top 15 places on the Index for developing countries: Barbados, host to the global conference, takes the first place of all in this table, and beats several developed countries.

Literacy and life expectancy rates tend to be high, and infant mortality rates low. A high proportion of SIDS are democracies, and some – including Cuba, Mauritius and Singapore– have provided models of population control by investing heavily both in family planning services and in the welfare of their people, especially through women's education.

As a result, says Ambassador Penny Wensley of Australia, who chaired a crucial committee at the Barbados conference, the SIDS have met "indifference and scepticism" from the rest of the world when they have tried to present their case. "Their problems," she says, "are not seen to be on the same scale as those demanding attention elsewhere."

Yet, though small may be beautiful, it is also vulnerable – both environmentally and economically. Thanks to their size, most SIDS have few resources – natural, physical or human – and their economies depend on a small range of industries. So they have little ability to withstand crises.

Nauru provides an extreme case of a general truth – that many of the world's gravest environmental crises are at their most acute in SIDS. For example, three-quarters of all known animal extinctions in recent history have taken place on small islands. Half of Mauritius' endemic animal species have followed the dodo into oblivion, and nearly two-thirds of its unique types of plants are rare, threatened or extinct. And yet island wildlife is particularly diverse and valuable: Pacific delegates told the Barbados conference that their region contained 2,000 unique ecosystems.

Proportionately, SIDS are losing forest far faster than, say, Brazil. Their generally small endowments of topsoil are rapidly eroding, while generally scarce water supplies are being depleted, particularly by tourism. And only one-tenth of all the sewage discharged by tourists and residents into the Caribbean receives any form of treatment.

SIDS are increasingly being targeted as dumping grounds for toxic wastes; this year South Pacific nations began drawing up a treaty to ban imports of hazardous wastes into the region after receiving nine separate approaches

from developed countries wanting to ship them their poisons.

Even ordinary rubbish poses problems enough for tiny nations. In the Maldives, a new island has joined the 1,196 in the Indian Ocean chain – one entirely made of garbage. Already it protrudes some 1.8 metres above the waves, and threatens to become the highest point in the entire archipelago nation. As global warming causes the seas to rise, this rubbish may eventually be all that is left, a poignant (and pungent) memorial to what its president, Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, already describes as "an endangered nation."

Ultimately, sea level rise poses the greatest threat of all. Besides the Maldives at least four other countries – Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Tokelau and Tuvalu, all in the Pacific – are threatened with extinction. The highest point in Kiribati, for example, is just 0.6 metres above the waves, and scientists' best estimate is that the seas will rise by more than this over the next century.

James Gustave Speth, Administrator of UNDP, warned the Barbados conference: "The risks associated with global climate change and sea level rise are very real and, if current patterns of energy use continue, these risks will move from projection to reality in the decades ahead."

Yet these countries contribute almost none of the greenhouse gasses (such as carbon dioxide, for example, emitted by the burning of fossil fuels) that cause global warming. "SIDS have to live with the awful irony of being the most vulnerable, but the least responsible," says Tuiloma Neroni Slade, ambassador of Samoa to the United Nations.

The most vulnerable nations will become uninhabitable long before they physically sink beneath the waves, because the higher the seas rise, the more frequently storms will sweep the water across them. And even small increases in sea-level will cut away great swaths of land and contaminate the underground fresh water supplies on which the people living on atolls depend.

Tuvalu, in the Pacific, is already submerged twice a year and new building regulations stipulate that houses must be built on stilts. A report by the Government of the Marshall Islands has warned that many of their 50,000 people may have to be evacuated over the next few decades, while its foreign minister has warned that rising seas "could annihilate the country as effectively as a nuclear bomb."

Even relatively hilly countries are in severe danger, for most of their people and industries are concentrated on their coastal strips. And as the climate heats up, storms and hurricanes are expected to increase, causing devastating damage to the economies of small islands. A hurricane in Samoa in 1991 did damage equivalent to its entire annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP), while Dominica's economy had still not recovered five years after being battered by Hurricane David in 1979. Professor Godwin Obassi, secretary-general of the World Meteorological Organization, says that losses of a fifth to a third of GDP are "not uncommon."

By the beginning of last year, after an unprecedented series of hurricanes, 24 insurance companies withdrew completely from the Caribbean. Samoa's only fire and general insurer announced – after two record cyclones in less than 18 months – that it would cease all coverage once existing policies ran out. And other companies have raised their rates by 300 to 400 per cent.

Island economies – often heavily relying on one crop, or on tourism – are vulnerable to economic storms as well: recessions, too, can cause losses of a third of GDP. Tourism is a popular route to quick development, but often causes environmental damage which eventually frightens visitors away.

Domestic markets are small, and it is hard for the SIDS to penetrate the major overseas ones. Foreign private capital is more attracted by bigger opportunities. Infrastructure is costly to install for small populations. Limited human resources make administration and management difficult, and the lack of opportunities and introverted atmosphere of many small islands make it hard to retain skilled people. Unemployment is rising; even Barbados, which used to have one of the highest employment rates of any developing country, has recently been hit by a wave of joblessness.

Aid has always gone disproportionately to the richer SIDS and little has been devoted to promoting sustainable human development. Aid is now declining, and many island states are also facing lowering levels of trade preferences.

The Barbados conference recognized the special vulnerabilities of SIDS, approving a declaration and a programme of action. Crucially, and after much resistance from industrial countries, it reaffirmed the commitment made at the Rio Earth Summit two years ago that the international community should provide "adequate, predictable, new and additional financial resources." It thus avoided reneging on the Earth Summit, but did little to take the Rio process further forward.

UNDP launched two programmes at the conference to help SIDS in the Caribbean and the Pacific to integrate environmental issues into their development policies, as part of Capacity 21, which is designed to help developing countries put the Rio agreements into practice. It also moved to link small island states into global information and communication networks through SIDSNET (part of UNDP's Sustainable Development Network), to help them share information and learn from the experiences of other countries.

Lewis, Barbados' minister of the environment, says, their smallness and their discrete boundaries mean that they could, "as microcosms of the rest of the world, act as real life laboratories in the transition to sustainable development."

Nauru may already be making a start. It has begun a slow and painstaking process of trying to recreate the island, crushing the coral tombstones, returning topsoil, and replanting trees and forests. "Our rainforest will live again," says Kinza Clodumar, "and with it the myriad

THE FATE OF THE SIDS AFFECTS ONE-SIXTH OF THE EARTH'S
SURFACE, FOR THEY ARE CUSTODIANS OF 30 MILLION SQUARE KILOMETRES
OF OCEAN THAT FALL WITHIN THEIR EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONES.

The conference's most important result, however, was the increasing cohesion and determination of the SIDS themselves. Over the last four years – since forming the Alliance of Small Island States in November 1990 – they have been developing some unexpected muscle since, when they act together, they control a large block of votes in the UN General Assembly.

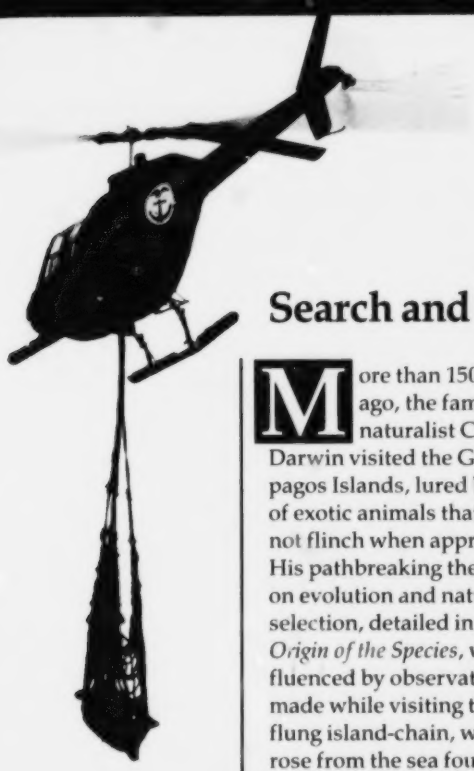
They played an important part in securing the international treaty to combat global warming, signed in Rio. Bigger countries have begun to seek their help to get elected to the Security Council; New Zealand owes its present seat largely to the Pacific Islands, for example.

The fate of the SIDS affects one-sixth of the Earth's surface, for they are custodians of 30 million square kilometres of ocean that fall within their Exclusive Economic Zones. As Senator Harcourt

of birds and animals, and the coral reef that is the cousin of the forests," all will live again.

"We can and will rebuild our beloved Nauru. In so doing, we hope and expect that all of our small island states and peoples can inspire and inform the rehabilitation of the larger island that is our Earth." ■

GEOFFREY LEAN, THE ENVIRONMENT CORRESPONDENT OF THE INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY, HAS BEEN WRITING ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT FOR NEARLY 25 YEARS, AND HAS WON MANY AWARDS FOR HIS WORK.



Search and Rescue in the Galápagos

More than 150 years ago, the famed naturalist Charles Darwin visited the Galápagos Islands, lured by tales of exotic animals that would not flinch when approached. His pathbreaking theories on evolution and natural selection, detailed in *The Origin of the Species*, were influenced by observations he made while visiting this far-flung island-chain, which rose from the sea four million years ago and boasts many rare and endemic species that evolved largely in isolation over the centuries.

But what a difference a mere century can make. While tourism has been carefully controlled and 97 per cent of the Galápagos is protected by Ecuador as a national park, growing urban settlements and intrusions by man have threatened the archipelago's remarkable evolutionary chain. Of the 14 subspecies of giant tortoises that once roamed freely here, three are now extinct, and the others are considered endangered. Many other plant and animal species are also on the endangered list.

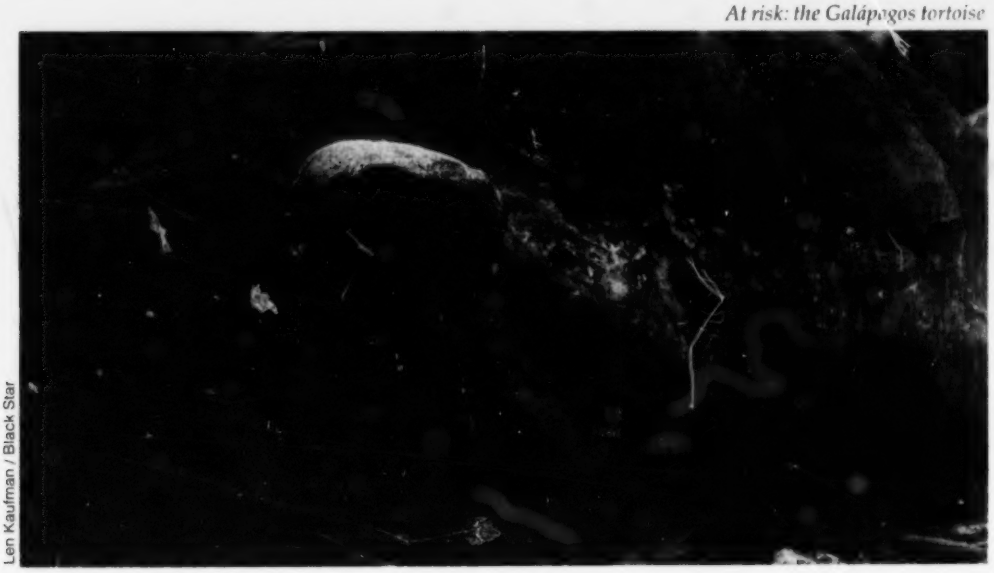
It is not surprising therefore that when a fire broke out on Isabela Island last spring and threatened the habitats of two rare subspecies of giant tortoises, a cry for help rang out. "Saving them was essential," says Mario Salzmann, resident representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Ecuador. "Their numbers are so drastically reduced already that protecting the few that remain is a moral imperative."

To save the tortoises from the wildfire and poachers, who consider their meat a delicacy, UNDP allocated emergency funds to help launch "Operation Ninja." The initiative brought together Ecuador's Army, the Galápagos Presidential Commission, UNESCO and the National Park Service in what could have been a made-for-television search and rescue mission.

The tortoises were airlifted to safety by helicopter to a holding facility in nearby Puerto Villamil, and plans to set up a breeding programme are now under way. In all, only 14 tortoises were found, attesting to their already dangerously reduced numbers.

"If we had not intervened," says Salzmann, "the tortoises would not have been saved." What is important now, he adds, "is to raise awareness and the necessary political will to ensure that these rare tortoises, and other unique species in the Galápagos, are not lost forever." — **Sid Kane**

At risk: the Galápagos tortoise



Len Kaufman / Black Star

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